

DOMINICAN SCHOOL  
OF PHILOSOPHY & THEOLOGY

**Format & Procedure for Comprehensive Exam,  
MA (Philosophy), Exam Option**

For the capstone of MA (Philosophy), Exam Option, students must pass a written comprehensive examination which assesses their general knowledge and ability to integrate philosophical ideas, thus ensuring the achievement of an adequate knowledge of systematic and historical philosophy.

**Philosophy Exam Format:** The exam is a three-hour, closed-book exam that takes place at the end of the student's final academic year in the program. No study materials or notes of any kind are allowed, nor are any electronic devices (cell phones must be off). The expectation is for the student to produce more than bullet points and disjointed paragraphs, but rather to compose two essays in response to the questions, demonstrating a coherent thought process. The writing of these essays should conform to expected standards of academic writing, including use of proper English, grammar, and spelling. The answers will be hand-written and photocopied at the end of the exam, and the student will be responsible for transcribing them into a legible format, making only grammatical and syntactical changes, but no substantive ones. A standard set of study questions is made available to students as a preparation tool. The exam is prepared by the Department Chair who selects one question from a topic in systematic philosophy and one from historical philosophy from among a set of questions submitted by Faculty. Those Faculty whose questions have been chosen also grade each student's responses to both exam questions, submitting the final grade to the Philosophy Department Chair. Categories for grading are: *pass*, *fail with possibility of retaking the exam*, or *fail without possibility of retaking the exam*. In the case of a disagreement between the professors grading the exam, the Adviser (or, if someone else is needed, a professor appointed by the Department Chair) becomes a third reader, where the agreement of two of the three suffices for grading. The Department Chair communicates the results to the Academic Dean, the Registrar, and the student.

The exam will be scheduled once toward the end of each semester, with the dates posted on the academic calendar. Students wishing to take the exam in a given semester must register no later than the close of the late registration period of that semester.

**Exam Procedure:** The Philosophy Department Chair elicits from the professors of each core class two (2) study questions from each of those classes; the resulting set of questions are maintained and updated regularly by the Department Chair in communication with the professors of the department. At least three months before the exam, the Department Chair communicates this complete set of questions (as a study guide) to those students who are candidates for the exam. Prior to the exam, the Department Chair chooses one question from the systematic area and one from the historical area, informing the two graders at least two weeks before the exam date. The exam is ordinarily scheduled each semester for the Saturday that falls six days before the final Friday of instruction. The Department Chair forwards these two questions and any necessary instructions to the Proctor, who administers the exam (or the Department Chair may act as Proctor). Just before the beginning of the exam, the Proctor shall review the procedure for the exam with the student. Then, at the beginning of the exam, the Proctor shall supply to the student a printed copy of the two questions to be answered, along with plain paper (with some

identifying characteristic). The student shall write a response to each question only on the paper supplied by the Proctor. The student shall write on only one side of each sheet of the paper, numbering each page, writing his/her name on each page, and shall write on the first page the total number of pages comprising the two responses written (in addition to the page containing the exam questions).

After the exam, the Proctor shall create an electronic copy (scanned) and two photocopies of the complete responses, sending the electronic copy and the two paper copies to the Philosophy Department Chair. The Proctor shall give the original set of responses back to the student. The student then, within three days, shall transcribe the responses into typewritten form and shall send this transcription electronically to the Philosophy Department Chair. The Philosophy Department Chair shall forward the electronic scanned copy, the paper copy, and the student's transcription to each reader. The student's transcription may correct only typographical errors or errors in punctuation or basic grammar; the transcription may introduce no new words, no new sentence structure, nor any material of substance. The graders shall ensure that the student's transcription conforms to these restrictions.

Each reader shall grade the responses to both questions, communicating the result to the Philosophy Department Chair. The Department Chair shall send copies of the Exam Form, the Exam Evaluation Form, and the student's electronic transcription to the Academic Dean and the Registrar (electronic copies going to the Dean and Registrar, and paper copies going to the Registrar alone). At that time, the Department Chair shall communicate the overall result (i.e., *pass*, *fail with possibility of retaking the exam*, or *fail without possibility of retaking the exam*) to the student; the Department Chair may also relate to the student any substantive feedback by those who graded the exam. The Registrar shall file the results of the exam in the student's record, including in Populi (visible to the student as a pseudo-course entitled "MA 5506 – MAPH Examination," under the "Assignments" for that entry).

*This document is subject to change without notice. For the most current, official policies regarding examinations, refer to the DSPT Student Handbook.*